

Bike/Walk Midland: Parental Examples/Teaching Children

Parents and caregivers can help children learn and develop skills and behaviors by providing repeated instruction and modeling. Children who are four to six years of age are entering a time when their physical and mental abilities allow basic walking safety skills to be introduced, discussed and practiced. Children seven to nine years old can continue expanding their pedestrian abilities and knowledge through more education and practice with adult supervision. As with younger children, seven to nine year olds are developing and gaining skills at varying rates. Children age ten and older continue to develop their physical, cognitive and psychosocial abilities.

Parents can help teach and reinforce judgment skills by walking and bicycling with their children and modeling safe behavior. Young children need to walk with a parent or caregiver to practice safe street crossing behavior. Attention-switching and concentration are cognitive skills that children are developing and improving throughout childhood, so they often need extra help focusing on the important information in a crossing or pedestrian situation. Children need help from adults to repeat the process of "stop, wait, listen and look while crossing at a curb" successfully many times before they can complete it safely by themselves.

The ultimate goal of a parent's time spent discussing and modeling safe walking and cycling with children and giving them opportunities to practice is to help children become safe, confident and independent pedestrians and bicyclists. They will be able to recognize and pick the best places to walk, ride, cross, and behave as safely as possible near traffic. These children will also grow up to become better drivers because they understand how to share the road with people on foot and bicycle.

The Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program has a great website on this topic:
www.saferoutesinfo.org/resources/collateral/TeachingChildrentoWalkSafely.pdf

For more information: www.midland-mi.org/government/departments/planning/Planning/planninghome.htm